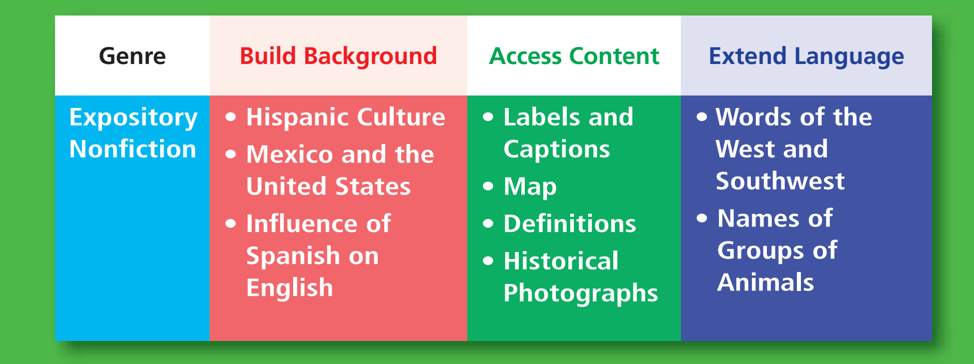
ELL Reader

Social Studies

Social Studies



Genre	Build Background	Access Content	Extend Language
Expository Nonfiction	• Hispanic Culture • Mexico and the United States • Influence of Spanish on English	• Labels and Captions • Map • Definitions • Historical Photographs	• Words of the West and Southwest • Names of Groups of Animals

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First, It Was a Rancho



The Story of Ranching in the West and Southwest

by Luz Paredes

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Spanish Names

Have you ever noticed that many places in the West and Southwest of the United States have Spanish names? For example, there are the states of Colorado and Nevada. The word *colorado* means "red" in Spanish, and *nevada* means "snow-capped," as in "snow-capped mountain."

Look at a map that shows places in Colorado, Nevada, California, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming, Arizona, and Texas. You will see many more places with Spanish names—towns, cities, rivers, lakes, deserts, valleys, and mountains. For example, the city of Los Angeles has a name that means "the angels." The name *Rio Grande,* for the big river in New Mexico and Texas, means "big river." There's a good reason so many places in the West and Southwest of the United States have Spanish names. About 150 years ago, all that land was part of Mexico, where Spanish is spoken.



Shaded in yellow: In 1836, United States settlers formed the Republic of Texas and broke away from Mexico. Later it became the state of Texas.

Shaded in red: After a war between the United States and Mexico, in 1848 Mexico turned this land over to the United States.

Shaded in green: In 1853, Mexico sold this land to the United States.









Everything that a *vaquero* wore and carried was useful to him in his work.



Before 1821, Mexico was a colony of Spain called New Spain. In 1821, Mexico became independent.

When Mexico was a Spanish colony, the kings of Spain gave large pieces of the land to their loyal followers. These large pieces of land became *ranchos,* or ranches. The ranches had large herds of cattle that had been running wild in the region. The ranch owners hired horsemen to work with the wild herds. These horsemen were called *vaqueros,* or cowboys. The word *vaquero* comes from the Spanish word *vaca,* which means cow.

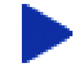




After Mexico won its independence from Spain, the government continued giving land to people willing to settle in some places. People worked quickly to turn their land into *ranchos.* These Mexican lands had many wild horses and cows, especially around the area that is now southern Texas. These animals came from horses and cows that early Spanish expeditions had brought to North America.

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expeditions: groups of people making journeys to explore lands





By the 1830s, there were perhaps millions of wild horses and cows running free on the land. People who caught those animals could keep them. Everything on the frontier—the open land, the animals—was ideal for the ranching way of life to develop. This way of life began when the land was part of New Spain. It continued when the land became part of Mexico, and it went on when the land became part of the United States.



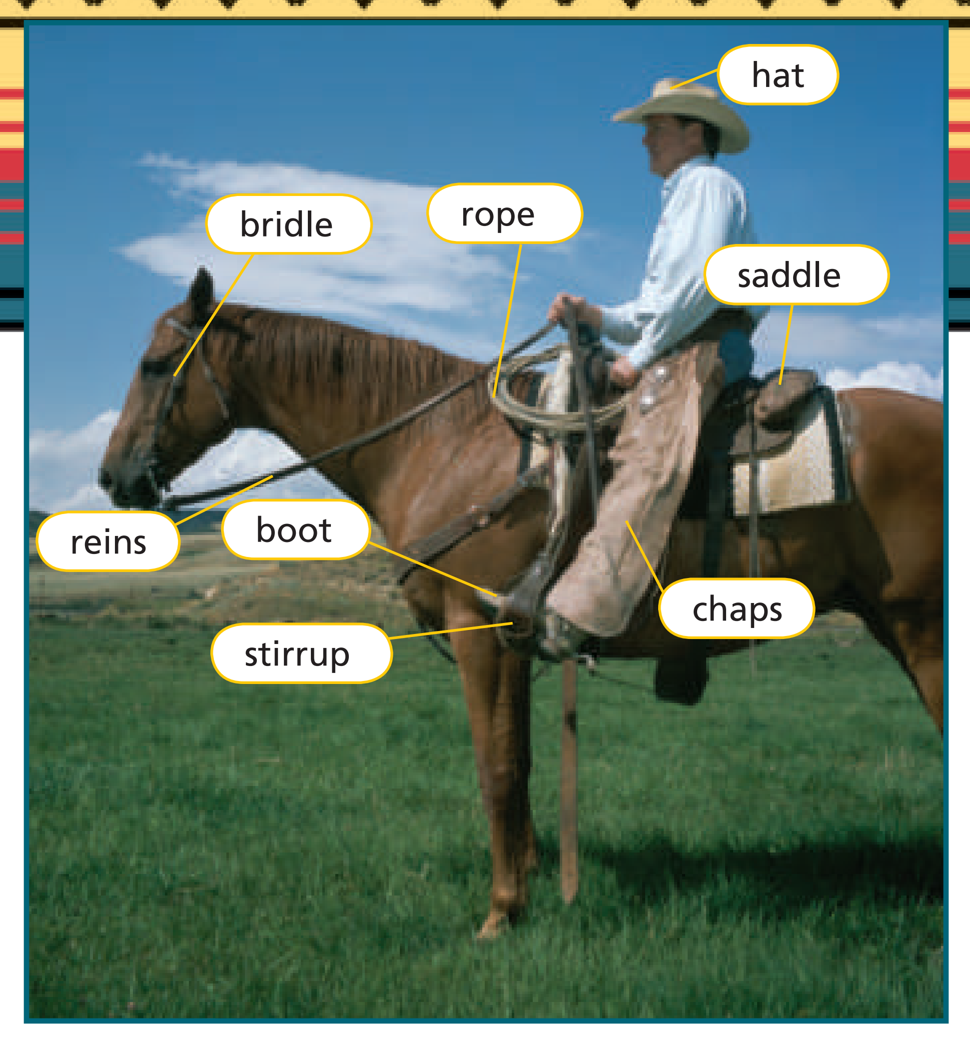
Extend Language — Words of the West and Southwest

As settlers came to places that are now the West and Southwest of the United States, they began to use Spanish words such as *adobe, bronco, corral, patio, rodeo,* and *hacienda.* These words are spelled exactly the same way in Spanish and English.

But the settlers changed other Spanish words, spelling them quite differently in English. Look at these words.

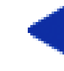
vaquero buckaroo ***lazo*** lasso ***la reata*** lariat

Vaquero means "cowboy." The word *buckaroo* is another word in English for cowboy. Look up *lasso* and *lariat* in a dictionary to learn what they mean.



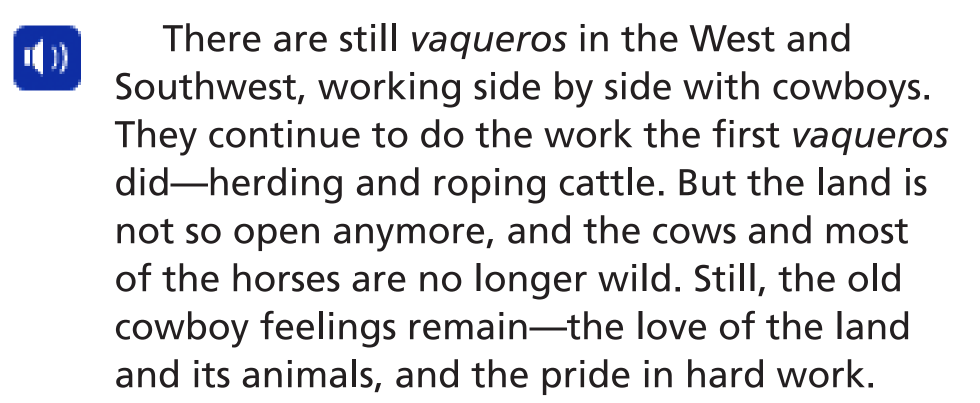


The Spaniards also brought their ways of working with the animals. In Spain, men rode on horseback to herd cattle. They put brands, or marks, on animals to identify them. They also held roundups, called *rodeos* in Spanish. The *vaqueros* taught American cowboys these skills after the land became part of the United States. U.S. cowboys also wore spurs and much of the same practical clothing that *vaqueros* wore.





Vaqueros pose for a picture in Texas.



There are still *vaqueros* in the West and Southwest, working side by side with cowboys. They continue to do the work the first *vaqueros* did—herding and roping cattle. But the land is not so open anymore, and the cows and most of the horses are no longer wild. Still, the old cowboy feelings remain—the love of the land and its animals, and the pride in hard work.



Talk About It

1. Why were there wild cows and horses on the frontier?
2. Why would people want to settle on the open lands that had wild cows and horses but not many other people?

Write About It

3. On a separate paper, make a list of the clothing the *vaqueros* and cowboys wore. Write about the clothing you think was most useful to them. What protected them from bright sunlight, strong wind, or the dangers of their work?

Extend Language

Groups of animals have special names in English. For example, a group of cattle, sheep, or goats is a *herd.* Here are other names of animal groups:

school of fish	swarm of locusts
pack of wolves	pride of lions

Look up the word *flock* in a dictionary to find out the groups of animals that it names.

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ISBN: 0-328-14193-3

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